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Resolve, To Establish a Working Group To Study the Prevalence and Cost of Hearing Loss and the Use of Hearing Aids and Other Devices in Maine's Elderly Population

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, a growing number of elderly individuals who have a significant hearing loss are unable to afford hearing aids; and

Whereas, current programs provide inadequate assistance to prevent a growing number of elderly individuals from suffering significant hearing loss without remedy; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1 Working group established. Resolved: That the Working Group to Study the Prevalence and Cost of Hearing Loss and the Use of Hearing Aids and Other Devices in Maine's Elderly Population, referred to in this resolve as "the working group," is established; and be it further

Sec. 2 Working group membership. Resolved: That the working group consists of the director of the Division of Deafness within the Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, who shall be the chair of the working group; the director of the Office of Elder Services within the Department of Health and Human Services or the director's designee; and the following 7 members appointed by the Governor:

1. One member from the Maine Academy of Audiology;
2. One member from the Area Agencies on Aging;
3. One adult consumer with a hearing loss who uses a hearing aid;
4. A representative from the Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Deafness Advisory Council's ad hoc committee on the late-deafened and hard-of-hearing;
5. One adult consumer with a hearing loss, representing the deaf community;
6. One member from a consumer services agency that serves the mental health needs of elderly citizens; and
7. One member from the Maine Center on Deafness; and be it further

Sec. 3 Appointments. Resolved: That all appointments must be made no later than 30 days following the effective date of this resolve. Within 15 days after appointment of all members, the chair shall call and convene the first meeting of the working group, which must be no later than 30 days after the appointment of all members is complete; and be it further

Sec. 4 Duties. Resolved: That the working group shall study the prevalence and cost of hearing loss in Maine's elderly population.

In examining these issues, the working group shall specifically examine:

1. The number of elderly individuals who have a hearing loss significant enough to affect their daily functioning, community participation or finances;
2. The impact of untreated hearing loss on elderly individuals who need hearing aids but cannot afford them;
3. The operation and effectiveness of existing programs available to assist elderly individuals with hearing aids;
4. Opportunities for coordination among existing state programs, or with the private sector, to maximize the effects of available resources;
5. Approaches, opportunities, techniques and programs used in other states to address the need for hearing aids by elderly individuals;
6. Options on potential approaches, techniques and programs in Maine for providing hearing aids to elderly individuals, including different methods of program administration and delivery so as to maximize program availability statewide and minimize overhead costs;
7. The projected cost of developing and delivering a pilot program to provide hearing aids to elderly individuals;
8. The projected cost of taking no action to develop any program to provide hearing aids to elderly individuals; and
9. The feasibility of funding from the state universal service fund a hearing assistance program, to include grants to eligible low-income persons for the purchase of hearing aids and subsidies for captioned telephone service; and be it further

Sec. 5 Staff assistance. Resolved: That the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services shall provide, within existing budgeted resources, necessary staffing services to the working group; and be it further

Sec. 6 Report. Resolved: That, no later than December 7, 2007, the working group shall submit a report to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services that includes its findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation for the Second Regular Session of the 123rd Legislature. The working group is not authorized to introduce legislation. The Joint Standing Committee on Labor and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services are authorized to submit legislation pertaining to the report.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.